

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUEBEC 0218

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJ: THERE IS NO JOY IN MUDVILLE

REF: QUEBEC 0217

1. REACTIONS TO THE RADIO-CANADA POLL (REFTEL) WERE PREDICTABLE, WITH THE PQ ATTEMPTING A STIFF UPPER LIP AND THE LIBERALS OPENLY JUBILANT. RENE LEVESQUE PRONOUNCED HIMSELF "UNSURPRISED" WITH THE RESULTS, SAYING THAT THE POLL CONFIRMED PRIVATE PQ SOUNDINGS. THE SHARP RISE IN THE POPULARITY OF THE LIBERALS, LEVESQUE SAID, LARGELY REFLECTED A CONTINUING RETURN TO THE FOLD OF THE TRADITIONALLY LIBERAL ANGLOPHONE VOTER. AMONG FRANCOPHONES, HE ASSERTED, POLL DEMONSTRATES SUPPORT FOR THE PQ IS HOLDING STEADY. LEVESQUE ADMITTED TO BEING ASTONISHED AT THE CONFUSION OF QUEBEC VOTERS OVER THE MEANING OF SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION AND PROMISED AN INTENSIVE INFORMATION CAMPAIGN TO ENLIGHTEN THE ELECTORATE. (ONE OF THE QUESTIONS IN THE POLL, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS "DO YOU BELIEVE THAT WITH SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION QUEBEC WILL CONTINUE TO ELECT DEPUTIES FOR THE HOUSE OF COMMONS IN OTTAWA? 30 PERCENT RESPONDED YES, INCLUDING 49 PERCENT OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY SUPPORTED SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION AND 28 PERCENT OF THOSE

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WHO CLAIM TO BE "VERY PEQUISTE.")

2. LIBERAL LEADER CLAUDE RYAN, IN UNCHARACTERISTICALLY EXPANSIVE MOOD, SAID THAT THE POLL SIGNALLED "THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF THE PARTI QUEBECOIS" AND PREDICTED THAT FUTURE POLLS WOULD SHOW SIMILAR RESULTS "SINCE QUEBECERS KNOW

WHAT THEY WANT." HE SAID THAT HE WAS GRATIFIED WITH HIS PARTY'S 25-POINT INCREASE SINCE A SIMILAR RADIO-CANADA POLL WAS HELD IN APRIL 1977, AND POINTED OUT THAT HIS OWN SLIM LEAD OVER RENE LEVESQUE WOULD HAVE BEEN FAR WIDER IF TRUDEAU HAD NOT BEEN INCLUDED AS A CHOICE (THE FIGURES ARE RYAN 31 PERCENT, LEVESQUE 30 PERCENT, TRUDEAU 24 PERCENT, AND JOE CLARK 4 PERCENT).

3. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH PQ LEADERS WERE DOING THEIR BEST TO PUT UP A BRAVE FRONT, THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE POLL CAME AS A SHOCK TO THE RANK AND FILE OF THE PARTY. THE POLL WAS TAKEN IN MAY, AT A TIME WHEN PQ MORALE WAS BUOYANT AS RESULT OF DEFT MANEUVERING BY FINANCE MINISTER PARIZEAU ON SALES TAX ISSUE. AS EFFECTS OF SHOCK BEGIN TO DISSIPATE, PQ CHEERLEADERS ARE BEGINNING TO CALL FOR SUPREME EFFORT SUCH AS THAT WHICH TURNED PARTY'S ELECTORAL DEBACLE OF 1973 INTO VICTORY IN 1976.

4. POLLSTER MAURICE PINARD CALLED ME AGAIN TODAY TO SHARE SOME FURTHER THOUGHTS ON LATEST SURVEY. THE POLL REVEALED MORE THAN A CONTINUED RETURN OF QUEBEC'S NON-FRANCOPHONE VOTERS TO THE LIBERAL CAMP, PINARD SAID; THERE WERE ALSO INDICATIONS OF EROSION OF PQ SUPPORT AMONG WHAT HE CALLS "CONDITIONAL SOVEREIGNTISTS," I.E. THOSE WHO WOULD SUPPORT SOVEREIGNTY ONLY IF ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION WITH CANADA WERE ASSURED. THESE VOTERS ARE NOW BEGINNING TO DOUBT THAT ASSOCIATION IS POSSIBLE AND ARE MOVING TENTATIVELY INTO THE "UNDECIDED" COLUMN. PINARD CAUTIONED THAT IMPRESSIVE GROWTH IN SUPPORT FOR LIBERALS
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COULD MISLEAD. IT MAY BE, AS RENE LEVESQUE CLAIMS, RESULT OF LARGE SCALE MOVE OF ANGLOPHONE VOTERS IN WEST MONTREAL BACK TO LIBERALS. SHOULD THIS BE THE CASE, EVEN RELATIVELY MASSIVE VOTE FOR LIBERALS IN WEST MONTREAL WOULD STILL ONLY TRANSLATE INTO SEVEN ASSEMBLY SEATS. THE CRUCIAL QUESTION, ACCORDING TO PINARD, IS THE SPREAD OF LIBERAL SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE PROVINCE. HE POINTED TO PQ EXPERIENCE IN 1973 WHEN THEY WON 30 PERCENT OF POPULAR VOTE BUT ONLY 7 SEATS IN ASSEMBLY BECAUSE THEIR VOTE WAS HEAVILY CONCENTRATED IN A LIMITED NUMBER OF BIG RIDINGS IN EAST MONTREAL.

5. RADIO-CANADA'S POLLSTERS HAVE NOT YET RELEASED DATA ON GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF POLLS RESULTS. SHOULD THIS BECOME AVAILABLE, A MORE ACCURATE ANALYSIS OF POTENTIAL ELECTORAL STRENGTH WILL BE POSSIBLE. PINARD WILL TRY TO OBTAIN REGIONAL BREAKDOWN FROM POLL'S AUTHORS, AND HAS PROMISED SHARE IT WITH US IF HE IS SUCCESSFUL.
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